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George Charles Holls

A MEMOIR

BY

HENRY BARNARD, LL.D., L.H.D.
Late Editor of Barnard's American Journal of Education
First United States Commissioner of Education

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Preface

THIS memoir of my father was prepared by the late Dr. Henry Barnard in 1888, and was intended by him to appear in what was to be the final number of his great *American Journal of Education.* It was, in fact, printed, as pages 403 to 414 of that number, and the present edition is a reprint of advance sheets kindly furnished to me, with a few manuscript corrections, by the author. So long as there was the slightest hope of completing the final volume of his *Journal,* Dr. Barnard preferred that this memoir should not appear in separate form. His death, on July 5, 1900, has removed the last reason for hesitation or delay, and the memoir is now offered to the friends of my father, exactly as it was written.

Those who know the numerous writings of Dr. Barnard — in many respects the foremost American educator of the nineteenth century — are aware of the fact that he was not given to groundless eulogy or perfunctory commendation. In consequence, this most generous and affectionate tribute has an interest which may perhaps appeal to a wider circle than those who knew my father personally. It is, at all events, a noble and enduring memorial to the sincere friendship between two men, who, differing widely in most respects, were united in their self-sacrificing devotion to the same lofty ideals.

FREDERICK W. HOLLS.

Algonak, Yonkers, New York,
February 26, 1901.

George Charles Bolls

IN the history of education in the United States under the Constitution, the secular element largely preponderates, and the pioneers in organization or administration have generally been connected either with the public-school system, or with the higher educational and charitable institutions maintained by municipalities or States, and, in consequence, entirely independent of any church or denomination. But, on the other hand, in the ranks of Religion, closely identified with particular denominations, there have been

not a few to whom doctrines and dogmas were subordinate to the active work of education, and especially of charity, and whose influence, while to a certain extent circumscribed by the bounds of their own church, has yet extended far beyond these limits, and who are entitled to by no means the least honorable positions in the roll of honor of American educators.

Among Protestant denominations in this country, the Lutheran Church has risen most rapidly to prominence, at least in the number of its adherents. It is now the third in this respect and bids fair to maintain this position. Modest and unassuming, so far as self-advertisement and self-assertion is concerned, it has done and is doing a great work in educating millions of our naturalized citizens and their descendants, and it has been the means of acquainting this country with much that is best in German educa-

tional thought and the organization of charity. No one man has contributed more to this end than the distinguished philanthropist whose portrait precedes this necessarily brief sketch, and who, by his powerful thought and active and untiring labor in his chosen field, has won for himself a prominent place in the history of American education and charities.

George Charles Holls was born in Darmstadt, Germany, on February 26, 1824, and belonged to an old and highly respected family. His father served with distinction in the German war of liberation against Napoleon, but the moderate fortune of the family was lost in the financial distress attendant upon the war. The father was afterward appointed superintendent of governmental charities for the city of Darmstadt and province of Starkenburg, and thus the earliest impressions of the son were asso-

ciated with the dispensation of charity. The father died in 1830, and the task of educating his three children devolved upon his widow, a most remarkable woman, to whose loving influence and energy alone Dr. Holls was wont to ascribe his further success. He was educated in the excellent schools of his native city, and volunteered, in order to bear part of the cost of his education, to work as an apprentice with a friend of his father who was the owner of a large printing-house and bookbindery. The practical bent of his mind led him to seek a scientific rather than a classical education, with a view ultimately of teaching in the Realschule, or scientific school, at Darmstadt.

To this end and with the further object of perfecting himself in French, he entered the École Polytechnique at Strasburg, in 1841; but it was here that he felt what we should call a religious awakening, and a strong de-

sire to contribute his mite to the alleviation of human suffering. He left the school against the counsel of friends, and volunteered as an assistant to Inspector Becker, the head of the "Neuhof" Institution, a well-known house of refuge about six miles south of Strasburg. Here he remained more than three years, and was so successful that at the age of twenty he became first assistant to the Inspector, and often, for long periods of time, had entire charge of the Institution. Charles Henry Zeller, the celebrated educator and pupil of Pestalozzi, heard of the young man, and at his invitation Holls spent several months at Zeller's great institution at Beuggen, studying the history and theory of education under that great teacher. Meanwhile the experiment of the "Rauhe Haus," near Hamburg, had been going on for ten years and was watched with intense interest by young

Holls. He was powerfully attracted by the plan of a brotherhood of Christian workers, and after considerable correspondence, in 1846, he decided to join, and was thus brought into contact with one of the most remarkable men of the age, and one who was to exert a determining influence upon his whole future life, Johann Heinrich Wichern,[1] who has often been called the Howard of Germany, but who was even more. At a time when all Germany was given over to rationalistic theology Wichern succeeded in awakening an interest in Home Missions and Charity which has not yet subsided, and under the influence of which hundreds of great and important institutions were established in all parts of the German Empire, and an untold quantity of human misery was relieved. In 1833 he had es-

[1] For Memoir and portrait of Dr. Wichern, and description of the Rough House, with ground-plan of the institution, see Barnard's *Journal of Education*, vol. iii., pp. 5–20, 603–648.

tablished that most celebrated of German houses of refuge, the Rauhe Haus, near Hamburg, and a few years later he introduced into it what has since become famous as the "family system." This consisted in dividing the inmates into so-called "families" of from twelve to twenty in number, each in a separate building, and under the care of one or more "brothers," and the latter constituted the "Brotherhood of the Rauhe Haus." In this way the influence of the teacher or educator was brought as closely to the child as possible, and the latter was taught to consider the institution, not as barracks or a house of detention, but as a congregation of families of unfortunate children bound together by natural affection and under one common head. The "brothers" were young men of approved habits and ability, who, without taking any vow or making any pledge to that effect, had freely

devoted themselves to the relief of the unfortunate and who, in their position as "brothers," served an apprenticeship, as it were, fitting themselves to take charge, later on, of independent institutions. Thus the Rauhe Haus was not only a house of refuge for destitute children, but also a training school for charity workers. Wichern was the ideal head of such an institution. A strong personality, fully equipped with learning and ability, he was born to impress his views and his enthusiasm upon others; and long before the late President Garfield made a similar remark concerning Mark Hopkins, Dr. Holls, in an address before the Charities Convention in New York, in 1858, described "a common schoolroom with Wichern at the desk" as "almost a completely equipped university." A strong friendship immediately sprang up between the two men, although Wichern was the older by sixteen years.

Holls entered into the spirit of the Rauhe Haus with the enthusiasm of youth and religious conviction, and when, during the great famine of 1849, the Prussian Government applied to Wichern for "brothers" to take charge of the temporary governmental charities established to relieve the terrible distress in the province of Upper Silesia, Holls, though only twenty-four years of age, was selected as the chief of those sent. He established four orphanages, which contained, before the winter was over, upward of 4000 children, and he was indefatigable in his efforts to relieve what was probably the most disastrous famine of this century upon the Continent. At the same time he was actively preaching, and he learned the Polish language in order to be able to communicate more readily with the objects of charity, most of whom understood no German. His services called forth the highest encomiums from the Ministry of Public Worship and the Gov-

ernor-General of Silesia, but on account of failing health he was obliged to resign in 1850. He returned to Darmstadt and took up the scientific course in the highest classes of the Realschule at the point where he had abandoned it in Strasburg, supporting himself meanwhile by teaching, and helping to create an interest in Home Missions by lectures and the organization of societies for the purpose in the vicinity. He also visited Friedrich Froebel at Blankenburg, and was ever after a warm admirer of the kindergarten, though by no means blind to its defects, especially in the form originally proposed by its author.

A sudden impulse came to him in 1851 to emigrate to America, whither a younger brother had preceded him, and being convinced that he would find in the new world a larger field for his energies, he came to this country in June of that year. He traveled

via Liverpool, where he closely inspected the Harbor Mission, then in successful operation there, and this gave him the first ideas of the Emigrant Mission, of which he afterward became so active a promoter in New York. He settled in Pomeroy, Ohio, and engaged at once both in learning the English language and in teaching German and French at the academy established there. In the following year he returned to Germany and was married to Miss Louisa Burx at Darmstadt. The newly married couple settled at Pomeroy and remained there until 1855, when that eminent Lutheran philanthropist, Rev. William A. Passavant, having heard of Mr. Holls, extended to him a call to organize a large orphan asylum which was to be established at Zelienople, Butler County, Pennsylvania. It was the first Lutheran orphan asylum in this country, and the intention of the founders was to intro-

duce, if possible, the family system and the idea of home into such an institution in this country. Holls accepted the call and remained at the head of the institution for eleven years.

At this time the question of juvenile reform and the methods best adapted for the successful administration of reformatories and houses of refuge occupied the public mind in this country to a considerable extent.[1] The success of the family system and of the Brotherhood of the Rauhe Haus led many to hope that the same results would follow from their introduction here, but the circumstances were different, and Holls saw from the start that, unless certain fundamental difficulties could be overcome, any attempt to reproduce the German experiment on American soil would be a failure. In a letter

[1] "Preventive, Correctional, and Reformatory Institutions and Agencies." Republished from the *American Journal of Education*, edited by Henry Barnard, LL.D., 360 pp., Hartford, 1857.

which was published in the *American Journal of Education* for March, 1858, vol. iv, p. 824, he discussed the question at some length. Theoretically he expressed a strong preference for the family over the congregated system, saying: "From what I have been able to observe within the last fourteen years, during which time I have become acquainted with the practical working of the family system in such institutions as the Rauhe Haus, the Neuhof, near Strasburg, Beuggen and Czarkow, in Prussian Poland, I am prepared to say that I am, in theory, decidedly in favor of the family system, being convinced that it is the system by which houses of refuge and all smaller institutions of a preventive, correctional, and reformatory character ought, if possible, to be managed. The natural ground for the development of youthful life is in the family. If we were able to trace back each case of

degradation and crime to its original cause, we would find it to be, in almost all cases, the want of that kind, genial, winning influence and discipline which parental government alone affords. All the children that fill our reformatory institutions have been more or less destitute of a family life, family relations, and family discipline as it ought to be according to the divine law. Our institutions, therefore, ought to restore to these poor children, as far as it can be done, that of which they have been deprived, or at least that which they never enjoyed, a home, a family, with all its endearments." But he well understood the peculiar difficulties here. He observed: "There are elements of character in the vicious and unfortunate youth of this country which are different from those found in Germany. That spirit of independence which is growing up with the one, which exerts such a powerful influence over

his character, and which, when wrongfully applied, leads him not only to defy the laws and regulations of society but also to repel all efforts made by others to correct him, is at least to a considerable degree, unknown to the other, who is sooner taught to submit. It would, therefore, require greater efforts to exercise that influence over the youth in this country which should lead him to a truly religious reformation; but, believing in the almighty power of the Word of God, the happy effects produced by a kind, just, and firm treatment, by continual personal intercourse with these children on the part of the house father, the elder brother or sister, I believe that these efforts might be crowned with equal success here as elsewhere. But the most important difficulty that presents itself to my mind in introducing the family, as existing in the Rauhe Haus, into this country, is the great want of competent per-

sons to take charge of these families. . . . Without these the system must necessarily prove a failure. Classes of fifty or more children are no families. If we intend to produce the greatest amount of good to our children individually by the family system, these families must be small—say from twelve to fifteen each. Are suitable persons obtainable here, and if so, how? Can it be done without paying high salaries? These questions have occupied my mind for a long time. Persons in view ought to be truly religious in sentiment and character, who would consider it to be their duty to devote their lifetime and talents to this particular work. We must, therefore, waive the idea of enlisting persons into this service who would do it for the sake of a temporary employment, or in order to make a living. We must have missionaries to labor among the heathen in the midst of our Christian community. You

will have noticed that in my letter to the Hon. O. S. Strong of New York I suggested the idea of establishing a normal school in connection with one of the larger houses of refuge where the family system was to be introduced. My plan would be, that either the State government or a private society (the latter would be preferable) should furnish the means to pay for the instruction, boarding, and simple raiment of such young men as would be willing to enter under the proper conditions. . . . One of the main conditions, upon the happy realization of which the whole success of the Rauhe Haus depends, does not consist in having a number of competent persons, some of whom are teaching, others superintending, others again directing the technical affairs of the house, but it consists in having men, every one of whom unites all those faculties within himself, and who, thus prepared, work together

in the same spirit, having always in view the one main object of the whole and the particular question which has to be solved in and by each individual. Neither of the two institutions, the House of Refuge nor the Brotherhood, could exist without the other. . . . This field of labor is comparatively new in this country; it ought, therefore, to be discussed on all sides. The veil which yet conceals the great dangers threatening from below should be lifted, and the Christian community aroused to meet those dangers, not only with dollars and cents, but by giving the heart and at least part of a lifetime to this great cause before it shall be too late."

The difficulty of finding proper men as brothers or helpers proved insurmountable at Zelienople. Holls even made the experiment of sending for six young men from the Rauhe Haus to form the nucleus of a new

brotherhood, but not one of them proved competent or willing to continue the work here under the same conditions as in Germany.

The idea of a true home for the unfortunate, on the other hand, was established by Dr. Holls in this institution and in one of which he subsequently was the head, near New York, perhaps more successfully than has ever been done before. At his suggestion a rule was adopted permitting discharged inmates of the institution to return at any time in after life, if unfortunate, ill, or out of work. This gave to every child the idea of a permanent home, and it was reinforced by the homelike character of the discipline and house government.

In 1866 Dr. Passavant, in connection with the late Peter Moller of New York City, established the Wartburg Orphan Farm School near Mount Vernon, New York, and Dr. Holls, who had meanwhile

entered the Lutheran ministry and risen to a position of high honor and commanding influence in the Church, was called to organize the new institution. This he did, having succeeded in finding assistants whom he imbued with his own spirit and principles, and thus the Wartburg became the best example of his practical work of charity. It was in the true sense of the word a home for the friendless and destitute, on the idea that small institutions of not more than from seventy-five to eighty-five inmates, and imbued with the family spirit, are far more important and "successful" in the true sense of the word in the general work of charity than large institutions with perhaps hundreds of children under one general drill. Great stress was laid upon the cultivation of a taste for music and for innocent games and amusements on the part of the children. Dr. Holls was himself a thorough master of vocal

and choral music, and never neglected an opportunity of impressing its importance as an educational agency upon his assistants. In the judgment of the best authorities upon the subject, both the farm school at Zelienople and the Wartburg near Mount Vernon were model institutions.

Thoughtful men came from afar to study the working of these charities, and the writer does not hesitate to say that in the days of Dr. Holls' administration the Wartburg was the most admirable and perfect institution of its kind of which he has ever known. Dr. Holls was, of course, aware of the difficulty, in the face of the pressing needs of the day, of multiplying similar institutions, and indeed of the practical impossibility of continuing the Wartburg system indefinitely. The true and permanent value of the latter was in fixing a standard, indirectly even for larger institutions, as well as in affording the

best possible training-school for charity workers.

Dr. Holls came to this country in advance of the great tide of German immigration which for the last quarter of a century has had such a determining influence upon our national characteristics. He foresaw the result of so great an influx of foreigners into this country, and, as early as 1858, raised his voice in favor of the speedy Americanization of immigrants by education as the best and only possible remedy for the manifold evils which would otherwise ensue. No adopted citizen has loved this country more, and few have become so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of its institutions and its peculiar civilization. In impressing his views upon his countrymen, he was, however, far in advance of German-American popular sentiment, and he often suffered under the insinuation of having too little pride in the

land of his birth, and no regard for the interests and language of his own people. This charge was, of course, absurd. For a person of his very strong American sentiment, Dr. Holls was most active in seeking to impress the good characteristics of German thought and German civilization upon the social, and especially upon the religious, life of this country. In an address before German-American teachers, speaking of parochial schools in Columbus in 1858, he said: "We hear much of the so-called mission of the Germans in America. In my opinion, the first mission of the Germans in this country is to become Americans, and by that I mean that it is their duty, as well as their privilege, to enter deeply, heartily, and with all the fervor and steadfastness of Teutonic manhood into the current of American religious, political, and social life. There is no room in this country for a German nation

besides the American nation, and, if there were, neither this country nor the Germans would be the gainers by the establishment of one. It is the greatest possible mistake, and one which I regret to say is often made in the fatherland, to think that by the emigration of so many of her sons Germany is weakened, and vast numbers are lost to German thought and feeling. That which is best in German thought and feeling is, on the contrary, rejuvenated and strengthened, and receives a new lease of life in a wider and grander sphere by being absorbed in and becoming part of the thought and feeling of this nation, which is the people of the future as certainly as European nations may be called the people of the past. I would even go further, and maintain that the only ground upon which the establishment and spread of German churches, German schools, and German periodicals in this country can be justi-

fied is that they accelerate, instead of retarding, the process of absorption, which is as useful as it is inevitable, whatever may be said to the contrary." He then proceeded to prove the necessity of this absorption, and the hopelessness of all ideas of a separate permanent German community in this country, by showing how every nation, in order to retain its national characteristics, requires the exclusive possession of a country. He claimed that only by constant reinforcement from abroad, by further immigration, could the German language be maintained even for daily intercourse among Germans themselves, because all experience showed that the second generation knew little or nothing of their fathers' language, while the third was thoroughly American. We regret exceedingly that no complete report of this able address has been published, in which the soundness of the arguments advanced is

no less remarkable than the foresight displayed for the problems which then were only in the future, but which are now present and of vital importance.

Dr. Holls strongly opposed the custom, which even now exists in many German parochial schools in this country, of teaching European and especially German history more thoroughly than the history of the United States, and of using school-books published in Germany and imbued with the monarchical spirit of that country. Of the American public-school system he was a warm friend and unflinching advocate, in spite of much narrow-minded opposition within the boundaries of his own Church. At a meeting of the Lutheran Synod, to which he belonged, held in Brooklyn in 1877, a committee representing the fanatical sectarian view presented a report denouncing public schools as "pagan," and speaking of

them in terms no less harsh than those employed by Jesuits. This called forth determined denunciation and opposition from Dr. Holls, who took the bold ground that, however beneficial parochial schools might be in many localities, and especially in view of the necessity of hastening the transformation of Germans into Americans, the public-school system, as such, was more important for the welfare of this country and for the welfare of all the churches themselves than all parochial schools could ever be. The narrow and extreme views at the time prevailed, but the agitation against the public schools has greatly waned since that time, and may almost be said to be extinct.

Dr. Holls was equally in advance of his time, so far as German-Americans are concerned, in his opposition to the teaching of the German language in the public schools. His reasoning was the same as that advanced

in favor of the rapid absorption of the immigrants into the body politic. But at the same time he urged all Germans to continue the use of their native tongue at home so as to give the second generation the enormous advantage of the perfect command of two languages. His own son was thus taught German before he learned English; but the German language was used to convey the lessons of United States history and of the principles of this government into the child's mind, thus carefully distinguishing between useless foreign prejudices and the acquirement of a foreign language of incalculable practical value.

In all his endeavors in this direction Dr. Holls was prompted and greatly assisted by his wife, to whom this passing tribute is justly due, even in so brief a memoir. Herself a woman of unusual intellectual power, Mrs. Holls clearly saw the duties of educated

German-Americans, especially of such as occupied conspicuous positions in the Church, and the charm of her conversation was such that her influence was felt by a very wide circle of acquaintance, and her example was of the highest value. Adding the motherly element to the great charity work of her husband, with all the grace and sweetness of sincere and unassuming piety, it may indeed be said of her: "Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates."

Upon his removal to New York, Dr. Holls' field of labor was, of course, greatly enlarged. He was a constant contributor to the religious journals of his Church at home and abroad, and for some years occupied the position of secretary for foreign correspondence of the American Christian Commission. As such he was in constant communication with the leaders of charity work in England,

France, Germany, and Scandinavia, and his influence was largely instrumental in assisting the late Dr. E. C. Wines in organizing the International Prison Congresses. Together with Dr. Wines, Horatio Seymour, Francis Lieber, and Louis D. Pillsbury, he was active in the work of prison reform in the State of New York, and the only political work of his later years consisted in his efforts to secure the passage of the constitutional amendment which, by abolishing elective superintendents of State prisons, wrought such a beneficial change in prison management. He was a regular contributor to Barnard's *American Journal of Education*, and, together with the late Dr. Linus P. Brockett, translated several German educational classics, notably Raumer's "Geschichte der Pädagogik," for that periodical. It was his intention to write a comprehensive work on "Inner Missions," treating of the various

problems of charity work in America from the religious point of view, but in a scientific and practical manner; but the steadily increasing demands on his time prevented the carrying out of this idea, and thus deprived our literature of a work which is greatly needed, and which no man was more competent to write.

This is not the place to enlarge upon Dr. Holls' activity as a preacher and theologian. He steadily emphasized the sociological features of religious activity, and the results of his labors in this direction may be seen throughout the country in numerous hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged, and asylums for various classes of unfortunates, established largely through his influence and the force of his example. In his Church he occupied various positions of dignity and influence, and his activity was largely instrumental in establishing the Emigrant Mission

in New York, which, in its various branches, is now one of the glories of Lutheranism in America. Holding active works of charity in far higher esteem than dogmatical accuracy and niceties of doctrine, his last days were embittered by offensive and distasteful theological disputes; but he courageously upheld his own views, the influence of which is even now felt in every direction in the Church of his adoption. In 1883 he had a stroke of apoplexy, and after that time his health failed rapidly. The trustees of the institution urged him to postpone his resignation as long as the physician held out any hopes of convalescence, but in August, 1885, the case was seen to be hopeless, and, as it was aggravated by an equally serious and painful illness of his wife, he resigned and moved to Mount Vernon, to the house of his only son, Frederick William Holls, Esq., of the New York bar, where everything that

filial piety could do for his comfort and medical skill and nursing for his relief was done. He lingered for more than a year, but the end came on August 12, 1886. His wife survived him less than five months, dying January 6, 1887.

Dr. Holls' general character and worth are seen in his life-work, and little more need be said. Dr. Passavant, who knew him most intimately, in an obituary sketch says: "To do justice to the character and life-work of the deceased in brief limits is simply impossible. For nearly thirty years it has been our privilege to be associated with him in the most intimate relations of friendship and official intercourse, and we know not which to admire most, his goodness or his greatness, as evinced in his absolute submission to the authority of the Divine Word, his renunciation of all personal merit, and his implicit trust for salvation in the righteousness of

Christ Jesus his Saviour. A great reader and thinker, a scholar, a teacher, a philanthropist, who, while he gave his first thought to the care and instruction of the orphans, was yet alive to every form of rescuing mercy, and withal an able Christian minister, who fed the flock which Christ had purchased with His own blood — in all these aspects and relations Dr. Holls was a most unusual and superior personage. His growth in thought and general knowledge was excelled only by his familiarity with Christian doctrine; and strength and manliness, with the grace of charity, were the adornments of his character."

He was a bitter enemy of cant, and of the airs of sanctimonious unction which are so often connected with the dispensation of charity. Uniting gentleness and firmness to a rare degree, and never, in his days of health, losing for a moment his perfect self-

control, it may be truly said that he was "an educator by the grace of God."

His memory will be blessed by thousands, and we deem it a great privilege to include, in the closing volume of the *American Journal of Education*, this tribute to the beneficent labors of an educator and a most valued friend and adviser, with whom we became acquainted, by correspondence, near the time the first number went to press — now forty years ago.

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